

Ada County Domestic Violence Court (DVC)

The Ada County Domestic Violence Court (DVC), established in 2006, is an integrated domestic violence court based on the “one-family one-judge” concept. The same judge handles both the criminal domestic violence cases and related civil matters involving the same parties. The DVC team is made up of two judges, two prosecutors, a public defender, probation officers, a court coordinator, victim witness coordinators, the family court services coordinator, and a private member of the bar. The team meets regularly to assist in the management of the docket and develop plans to improve the Court.

The DVC is a fast-track court with intense supervised probation, post-sentencing judicial monitoring, specialized batterer assessment and treatment, and comprehensive case planning. At arraignment a pretrial conference is scheduled on average 12 days after the arrest versus 100 days for the traditional criminal court.¹ From arrest to sentencing, it is an average of 58 days for DVC versus 131 days for the traditional criminal court.² Offenders are typically ordered to two years of supervised probation, 52 weeks of batterer intervention, and/or to obtain additional evaluations (mental health or substance abuse), and/or to complete additional treatment (mental health, substance abuse). The expedited resolution of cases increases victim safety because offenders meet with their probation officer, obtain evaluations, and enroll in treatment quicker than in the traditional criminal court.

Post-sentencing judicial review hearings are unique to the domestic violence court. These hearings occur after the defendant has been sentenced and typically continue throughout the duration of their probation. At the hearing, the judge, probation officer, defense attorney, and prosecutor review the weekly batterer intervention reports, mental health treatment reports, substance abuse treatment reports, and/or any evaluations that have been completed. The weekly reports ensure offender accountability by providing up to date and detailed information about the defendant for each class they attend. At the hearing, the probation officer provides an oral report, which includes information about meetings, groups, drug tests, employment status, and any concerns about the defendant. If the defendant is noncompliant, they may be sanctioned by setting a quicker review hearing (e.g. 14 to 30 days), discretionary jail time, additional treatment, or filing a probation violation. These hearings ensure swift consequences for negative behavior.

The DVC works closely with community stakeholders to ensure offender accountability and victim safety. In 2013, the DVC was awarded an OVW Court Training and Improvements Program grant. The DVC partnered with Idaho Legal Aid, the Women’s and Children’s Alliance (community based victims’ services organization), FACES Family Justice Center, and three private counselors to provide wrap-around services to victims. This collaboration will ensure civil legal representation, case management, and counseling services are available at no cost to victims involved with the DVC.

In 2013, OVW selected the DVC as one of three courts to serve as mentor courts as part of the Mentor Court Initiative. The initiative recognizes well-established courts and enables them to guide other courts and courts-based programs seeking to improve their response to sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking cases and ensure victim safety and offender accountability.

One of the goals of the DVC is to instill confidence in the court system when people's lives intersect with violence and crime. This goal has largely driven the model and our willingness to have the model evaluated and tested to make sure we continue to be responsive to our local community leaders, partners and the citizens of our county.

¹ Ada County Domestic Violence Court Program Evaluation Report Qualitative and Quantitative Findings (July 2010), Carol Harper, Cindy Parry, and Natasha Grossman. The study was completed by grant awarded to the Idaho Supreme Court from the U.S. Department of Justice, Office on Violence Against Women, Grants to Encourage Arrest Policies and Enforcement of Protection Orders Program (award #2005-WE-AX-0135).

² *Id.*

Domestic Violence Court Statistics:

2013 (January through December)

- 426 active cases
- 1,010 individual post-sentence judicial review hearings
- 1,584 judicial contacts (pre-trial hearings, motions, post-sentencing review hearings) with defendants.

2012 (January through December)

- 404 active cases
- 1,190 individual post-sentence judicial review hearings
- 1,545 judicial contacts (pre-trial hearings, motions, post-sentencing review hearings) with defendants.

2011 (January through December)

- 341 active cases
- 991 post-sentencing judicial review hearings
- In 2011, we did not count the total judicial contacts (pre-trial hearings, motions, post-sentencing review hearings).